

A Patient's Guide to Taking Warfarin Safely

Because you have a condition that makes you more likely to form blood clots, your healthcare provider has prescribed Warfarin, also known by the brand name Cumudin.

Anticoagulants like Warfarin are often called Blood thinners, but they don't really thin your blood, instead they decrease your blood's ability to clot and increase the time it takes for a clot to form. Taking Warfarin is an important way for you to stay healthy because a clot can cause strokes or other harmful events.

Warfarin is a very helpful drug, but it can cause serious problems, such as abnormal bleeding. By careful monitoring, we can reduce the risk of bleeding. Kaiser Permanente has developed an excellent monitoring program to keep you safe while you take Warfarin.

Our program is run through the anti-coagulation clinic, also known as the ACC.

The clinic is run by an excellent and caring staff, many of whom you'll get to know over the months and years ahead. Our primary concern is your safety, which involves the accurate monitoring of your dose to prevent an abnormal clot or abnormal bleeding. This is not a traditional clinic in the true sense of the word since contact with the staff is only by phone. We are here to provide your care and support you, but you are the most important part of your care team. You'll need to be actively involved in the steps that will keep you safe. This video has some basic information to get you started.

The patient's guide to taking Warfarin safely and other reading materials that come with it, offer more details, helpful tips and tools and contacts. Please take some time to get to know these materials. Your involvement will make a critical difference in your care.

Your provider sets an ideal range for the time it takes your blood to clot. It needs to be not too fast and not too slow.

How much Warfarin you'll need to take to stay in that range depends on many factors.

Your body size and current health or illness affect how much Warfarin you take. So do the foods you eat, other medicines, herbals and vitamins you take. And how active you are. Your provider will also tell you and the anti-coagulation nurse or pharmacist how long you'll need to take Warfarin. It may be a few months or years, or even for the rest of your life.

Be sure to ask me if you have any questions about how long you need to take Warfarin. Never stop taking Warfarin on your own because it can cause serious problems.

Because the effect of Warfarin can change for so many reasons, we will closely monitor you to keep your clotting time within the safe range. This means you'll need to have your regular blood tests to check the time it takes for your blood to clot.

This test is called Prothrombin time or more commonly called, protime or PT. The test measures how quickly your blood clots. The results are recorded as a number known as the INR or International Normalized Ratio. You can just call the test and its result an INR. Your provider decides what is the ideal INR range for you.

Your latest INR is one of the main tools our nurses and pharmacists to rely on. It helps them tell if your Warfarin dose needs to be changed to balance how fast your blood clots. A lower INR usually means faster clotting, a higher INR means slower clotting.

You may have your blood drawn for this test at any Kaiser Permanente Lab. Your INR will be reported to the anticoagulation care management nurse or pharmacist by the next working day.

They will know what your INR should be. When your INR is NOT within the proper range for you, either too high or too low, they may need to change your dose of Warfarin. It is your responsibility to get your INR tests drawn at the lab so that our information is up to date.

You should also learn your INR range and focus on keeping your INR results within it. Know your INR range as well as you know your own phone number.

And it's just as important to tell the nurse or pharmacist what your usual pattern of eating, drinking and activities are. So many factors can raise or lower your INR that can it be hard to find the right dose of Warfarin for you.

The nurse or pharmacist will try to work with you to adjust your dose of Warfarin to fit your needs. The next working day, after each INR blood draw, an anticoagulation clinic nurse or pharmacist will call you with some important questions. They'll ask about factors that may affect how well Warfarin is working for you. Then, they'll tell you your INR results, what dose of Warfarin you should take and when your next INR blood test needs to be done.

If you won't be available for this call or if an anticoagulation clinic nurse or pharmacist has not called you by the second working day after your INR test is done, please call the anticoagulation clinic. To help us figure out the right dose, you may need blood drawn for an INR as often as twice a week.

Eventually you may be able to go safely as long as four to six weeks between INRs. The anticoagulation clinic staff will tell you how often to go to the lab for an INR blood draw.

For your safety, it's very important to follow the instructions about going to the lab. If you don't have INR tests when you need them, you can have bleeding or clotting problems that can even be life-threatening. It's also very important to follow the instructions about how much Warfarin to take. I can't emphasize enough never change your dose of Warfarin on your own. Warfarin comes in different strengths, in tablets of different colors. Make sure the nurse or

pharmacist knows the color of your current dose and make sure any refill package has the right strength.

It's always important to know how much Warfarin you should take each day and that you actually took the right amount. Your patient guide includes a daily dose calendar for you to write down what you took each day.

Sometimes we send you a letter instead of making a phone call. That's only when your INR has been in the right range for a long time. The letter will tell you your latest INR, when to return for your next test and that is safe to keep taking the same dose of Warfarin you've been taking.

If you'll be away from home when your next INR is due, call the anticoagulation clinic nurse or pharmacist. We can provide you with a travel letter that will help you get an INR while you're gone.

Being on Warfarin will not usually restrict your ability to travel.

To learn the details about lab costs, call membership services at:

503-813-2000

or toll free at 1-800-813-2000

What you eat and drink can also affect your INR.

The more consistent you are in what you eat and drink, the easier it can be to regulate your dose of Warfarin and keep your INRs in range.

Limit your intake of alcohol and over the counter drugs that contain alcohol.

All beverages containing alcohol can raise your INR and increase your risk of bleeding.

Leafy green vegetables can make it clot faster which results in a lower INR. Herbal remedies may contain vitamin K or C which also affect clotting.

You don't have to give up all your favorite things, but make sure the anticoagulation clinic staff knows what you usually eat and drink. And tell them whenever that changes. Your information packet has more details on how foods and Warfarin interact.

Fever, dehydration and illness, especially chronic illness, can all change the effects of Warfarin. You may need to work more closely with the anticoagulation clinic staff if you are ill.

Tell us if have any dental work, other tests or surgery scheduled. We may have to adjust your dose of Warfarin to get you INR to the level your provider tells us is safe for the particular procedure you will have.

Other medicines, both prescription or over the counter drugs, can change the way Warfarin works for you. Don't take any drugs, even over the counter ones, unless you've discussed them with your provider or pharmacist. Drugs in the aspirin family can make you bleed too easily when you're taking Warfarin. These include over the counter drugs and herbal products for pain, inflammation, colds and allergies.

For certain conditions, aspirin can have important benefits. It's safe to take aspirin when your provider has specifically told you that you should take it.

Low doses of acetaminophen such as Tylenol, are safe to take while you are on Warfarin. But if you take more than 7 regular strength tablets of these pain medicines per week, please tell your provider, pharmacist or anticoagulation clinic nurse. Your information packet has more detail on interactions between Warfarin and other drugs.

When you start any new drug, call the anticoagulation clinic.

Warfarin can cause birth defects. So a pregnant woman or a woman who might become pregnant, should discuss the drug's risks and benefits with her provider. However, a mother who is breast feeding, may take Warfarin safely after talking with her provider.

We check your INR often to make sure your blood is clotting just right. Not too fast and not too slow. But we still want to make sure you know the common danger signs related to Warfarin and how to respond to them for your safety. It's important to remember, if your blood clots too slowly there can be a danger of bleeding.

Bleeding may happen in any part of your body while you're taking Warfarin. Everyone on Warfarin will bleed and bruise more easily. It's important for you to check your urine and stool for any signs of blood. Black or maroon stools may mean bleeding. Also, watch out for bruises. Call your provider and anticoagulation clinic nurse or pharmacist if you see these early warning signs of problems with bleeding.

Your nose, gums or hemorrhoids bleed

You have a Heavier or longer menstrual flow

You have reddish or purplish spots on your skin...

Be careful so you don't get hurt. For example, you may need to limit or even quit certain activities. Even a small cut can become a serious event if your blood is not clotting properly.

If you are hurt, draw a line around the edges of new bruises. If a bruise begins to extend outside these lines, call your care team.

If you cut your arm or leg, elevate it above heart level. Maintain pressure on all cuts for ten minutes. If bleeding doesn't stop, call 911 immediately

Tell emergency personnel that you are taking Warfarin

It's also important to remember, if your blood clots too fast, there is a risk of harm from a clot.

A blood clot may form in any part of your body. You should pay attention to your body because a clot isn't always obvious. Watch out for signs that you may have formed a clot. These can include shortness of breath or chest pain. You may have severe pain, redness, swelling or weakness in an arm or leg. Your vision may suddenly change or you may suddenly lose sight in an eye. Your Speech may suddenly slur or you may lose your ability to speak at all. You may feel dizzy or faint. Part of your body may feel numb or tingly.

If you have any of these symptoms during business hours, call your provider.

After hours call, 503-813-2000 or 1-800-813-2000 and ask for medical advice.

If any of these symptoms seem severe, call 911 immediately.

We hope you never have any of that long list of symptoms. We hope your experience with Warfarin goes smoothly with no problems. The more you are a partner with us in your care, the fewer problems you should have. The more you know, the better partner you'll be. We can do so much more when you are active and involved. Please read the patient's care guide and other materials carefully.

It can be especially helpful to write down any questions that you have so you can discuss them with the anticoagulation clinic nurse or pharmacist when they call. This helps you to make the best use of your time on the phone.

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have about your care.

We are here for you.